

Dr. Kenneth A. Mathews, Genesis, Session 1, Introduction

NotebookLM's 20-min. Podcast

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Welcome to our deep dive today. We're tackling the book of Genesis. Specifically, we're diving into some excerpts from Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lectures.

Oh, Dr. Mathews, he's great. Yeah. And these questions of origins, they're always so fascinating, aren't they? And Dr. Mathews really has a way of making this ancient text feel relevant to a modern audience.

Absolutely. And one of the most striking aspects of his approach, I think, is how he emphasizes the continuing importance of Genesis. He argues that it's not just some old history book.

It's actually foundational to our understanding of how God wants us to know him and the relationship he wants with us. So it's not just about what happened way back then, but about understanding our own place in the universe. And our own relationship with God.

That makes it a lot more personal, doesn't it? It really does. And what resonates most with me, I think, is how Dr. Mathews links the idea of beginnings to endings. He uses this term, eschatological.

It basically means that Genesis isn't just about how things started, but it also points towards a final outcome, a future resolution. It's like the book sets the stage for a much larger story, a story that's still unfolding. Oh, I see.

So it's a framework for understanding not just the past, but also the present and the future. That's a great way to put it. Okay.

I like that. Yeah. So speaking of unfolding stories, Dr. Mathews also talks about the idea of blessing as being kind of a central theme in Genesis.

Yes. He says that the word blessing and words connected to blessing appear more in Genesis than in any other book in the Bible. Absolutely.

And he pinpoints three specific blessings that he calls, get this, programmatic. Programmatic. Okay.

It sounds a bit technical, I know, but what it really means is that these blessings aren't just isolated events. They actually serve as a sort of divine blueprint for God's plan to bless all of humanity. So, you know, pretty significant.

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. So these programmatic blessings are like milestones in God's plan for humanity, for the world, I guess. Yes, exactly.

So where do these blessings show up in the text? What makes them so important? Well, the first one appears right after the creation of humanity in Genesis 1.28. What's interesting is that God speaks directly to humans, which shows us right away his desire for relationship. He blesses them with the ability to have children, you know, to keep humanity going and gives them responsibility to care for the earth. It's almost like a cosmic call to action, you know? Yeah.

It's very timely, I think, this idea, especially right now with so much concern about the environment. Oh, absolutely. Reminds us that, yeah, we have a role to play.

It's not just about dominion over the earth, but also about stewardship, about taking care of it. Exactly. Now, the second blessing comes after the fall of man in Genesis 3, and here we see a shift in tone.

There's a sense of brokenness that enters the world. But amidst this judgment on the serpent, which of course we understand is Satan, God offers a glimmer of hope. He promises that a deliverer will come from the seed of the woman, someone who will ultimately defeat evil.

That's in Genesis 3.15. Wait, isn't that the first time we get a hint of this coming savior? It is. This idea that runs throughout the Bible. It is.

Absolutely. And it's such a pivotal moment. It introduces the idea of future redemption, you know, a victory over evil.

Yeah. So it's not just about looking back at the past. It's like it's future-oriented.

Does Dr. Mathews address this connection at all? Oh, he does. Absolutely. And what's even more intriguing is that this deliverer, he's prophesied to be injured, but he'll still deliver a fatal blow to the serpent's head.

So it actually foreshadows the idea of sacrifice being necessary for victory, a theme that we ultimately see fulfilled in Christ. Wow. That adds a whole other layer to it, doesn't it? It does.

This second blessing, it's not just about victory. It's about the cost of that victory. It's something to think about.

It really is. And then we come to the third blessing, which shifts the focus to Abraham and his descendants. You'll find that in Genesis 12.1-3. And this is where we encounter those famous promises to Abraham, land, offspring, and a special relationship with God.

Now, I'm curious, as a listener, which of these aspects of this third blessing resonates most with you? Well, the land, that's the promised land, right? On Anan. The promised land of Canaan, a homeland for Abraham's people, and offspring that ties back to that first blessing of procreation, continuing the human story. But the third part, that's the one that really jumps out at me.

God promises that Abraham will be a blessing to all nations. It's not just about one man or one nation, but about God's plan to bless the entire world through Abraham's line. It's a universal message of hope.

You're absolutely right. And it really gets to the heart of what Dr. Mathews emphasizes. Through Abraham's lineage, everyone on Earth has the potential to receive God's blessing.

It's a pretty remarkable concept. It connects us all to a larger story, a narrative of redemption and grace that transcends any individual or cultural boundaries. I like that.

Yeah. So we've been talking about these blessings, these three programmatic blessings. Yes.

And they really do seem to form the foundation of the whole Genesis story, don't they? It's like they're pillars that everything else kind of rests upon. Absolutely. I agree.

But I think before we go any further, we should probably step back for a second and consider the structure of Genesis, like how the book itself is organized. Yes. Dr. Mathews, he talks about two main ways to view the structure.

Right. Yes, he does. One way is to look at the content.

Okay. The different sections and how they relate to each other. And the other way is by focusing on a specific phrase that pops up throughout the book.

It's like a marker. Okay. Interesting.

So let's start with content. How does Dr. Mathews break down the book? Well, he divides it into two main parts. Chapters one through 11, those focus on what he calls the universal family.

Okay. So that's starting with creation, moving through the Garden of Eden, the flood, the Tower of Babel. It's the story of, well, all of humanity.

Right. Our shared origins. Right.

Okay. And then chapters 12 through 50, those shift to what he calls the patriarchal family. So we're tracing the line from Abraham to Joseph.

Okay. So we go from the big picture of humanity in the beginning to the story of this one family, the ancestors of the Israelites. Yeah.

You got it. It's like zooming in on a particular thread, you know, in this massive tapestry of human history. Yeah.

I like that. It's a great analogy. And within each of those sections, there's also kind of a symmetry.

For example, in the universal family section, you have those big moments, right? Right. Creation, the fall, the flood, the Tower of Babel. Right.

Each one marks a significant shift in the narrative. Like it pushes the story in a new direction. Okay.

So kind of turning points, you know, major shifts in the story. Yeah. Yeah.

I see that. And then in the patriarchal section, you have the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Each one, of course, playing a key role in shaping the destiny of their descendants.

It's fascinating how, you know, their individual choices and experiences have this ripple effect, you know, that impact generations to come. Yeah, it's true. Like their decisions are still affecting us today.

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And Dr. Mathews points out something interesting about Isaac specifically.

Okay. He says, Isaac's story, it's more transitional. Okay.

You know, serving as a bridge between the bigger figures of Abraham, his father, and Jacob, his son. Right. That makes sense.

Because Isaac's story, it often does get overshadowed by the more dramatic narratives of Abraham and Jacob. But you're right. He plays a vital role, you know, connecting those two generations.

Exactly. Exactly. And then, of course, you have Joseph.

Oh, Joseph. Yeah. His story, with all those twists and turns.

Betrayal, reconciliation. Oh, Isaac. It's a wild ride.

And it actually lays the groundwork for Israelites going down into Egypt, which then becomes the backdrop for Exodus. Right. So we see God's providence, even in those difficult, difficult situations, ultimately leading to, you know, the fulfillment of his promises.

It's a good reminder that God is working, even when we can't see the big picture. Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

So much going on behind the scenes that we're not aware of. All the time. All the time.

Yeah. Okay. So we talked about content, but you mentioned another way to look at the structure of Genesis.

You said there's this recurring phrase. Right. Right.

Yeah. Dr. Mathews points out this phrase, these are the generations of, and it appears, get this, 11 times throughout the book of Genesis. Okay.

11 times. So not just random. It's like, it's intentional, right? Like a literary tool.

Exactly. It's like a signpost. It helps us navigate through the book, helps us see how the different parts fit together.

Huh. You know what? I've never actually noticed that before. It's, you know, subtle, but effective.

Yeah. And what's interesting is that this phrase, it can introduce a genealogy. Right.

Like a family tree. Right. Or it can introduce an actual narrative, you know, a story.

Oh, so it's not always about lineage. It can be about marking a transition. Yes.

Exactly. Exactly. In the narrative, in the story.

Yeah. Yes. Highlighting an important moment.

For example, in Genesis 2.4, you have the phrase, these are the generations of the heavens and the earth. Right. And that actually introduces the story of the Garden of Eden.

Oh, okay. So not a genealogy there. Right.

Exactly. More like a heading that signals a new section. Right.

A new section. Okay. That's a really cool literary technique, actually.

It is. Yeah. I like that a lot.

And it creates the sense of order and purpose, even within the complexity of the narrative. This is making me think about the broader context of Genesis. You know, it's not just a standalone book.

It's part of the Pentateuch, or what's also known as the Torah. So how does that understanding, you know, being part of this larger whole, how does that affect how we read Genesis? Oh, that's a crucial point. Genesis is definitely part of a larger story that unfolds across those first five books of the Bible.

And you're right, the Hebrew word for those books is Torah. It's often translated as law. But as Dr. Mathews points out, that's a bit misleading, you know? Okay.

That translation doesn't quite capture the full meaning. So it's more than just rules and regulations. Right.

It's more about a way of life, a path to follow. So Torah is better understood as instruction or the way of the Lord. Okay.

So living in harmony with God's will. Yes. Aligning your life with his character, with his purposes.

Okay. That makes sense. But Genesis, it's mostly stories, right? Narratives about people and events.

How does that fit into this idea of, you know, Torah as instruction or a way of life? Well, that's where things get interesting. Dr. Mathews argues that the narratives in Genesis actually show us what a life lived according to God's ways looks like, you know? It's not so much about direct commands. It's more about portraying the

consequences of choices, the blessings of obedience, the struggles of living in a world that's been, well, you know, affected by sin.

So instead of giving us like a list of rules, it's kind of a real life example, stories that we can learn from. Yeah. Okay.

Okay. That makes sense. Apply to our own lives.

Absolutely. And he actually points to Genesis 18.19 where God tells Abraham that he chose him so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. Okay.

So, you know, Abraham's life, it has its ups and downs, but it becomes this model for how to live in a way that honors God. Yes, exactly. It's about setting an example for future generations, a pattern for how to live a life that's, you know, pleasing to God.

Okay. And that really sets the stage for the more specific laws and instructions that we get later in the Pentateuch. So it's like Genesis lays the foundation.

It shows us the why behind the what, you know, the heart behind the rules. This reminds me of something that Dr. Mathews said about viewing Genesis like the movie Back to the Future. Oh, yeah.

Could you explain that a little bit? What did he mean by that? Sure. So he suggests that we should actually understand Genesis in light of the revelation that's given at Mount Sinai, which is the focus of the rest of the Pentateuch. So imagine reading Genesis as if you were standing at the foot of Mount Sinai, having just received the Ten Commandments.

Okay. You know, your perspective on those earlier stories would be shaped by that experience. You wouldn't just see them as, you know, isolated events.

You'd see them as part of a larger unfolding plan, a covenant relationship between God and his people. So Genesis is like the prequel. Yes.

And we're meant to read it knowing what comes later. It's like watching the movie for a second time. Yes.

And now you pick up on those little hints, you know. Exactly. And it adds this whole new layer of depth and meaning, you know.

For example, the phrase, God said, is repeated a lot during the creation account. Right. And that connects with God speaking the Ten Commandments at Sinai.

It emphasizes that the God of Israel, you know, the God who gave the law, he's also the God who created the universe. Oh, I love that connection. It ties everything together so beautifully.

It shows that the God we meet in Genesis, he's the same God we see throughout the rest of the Bible. You know, God of creation, the God of the covenant, the God who desires this relationship with his people. I mean, that's powerful.

I know, it's beautiful. And this brings us to some really common questions that people have about Genesis, you know, questions about authorship and setting. Who wrote this book? When did these events happen? And where did they take place? I mean, these are questions that scholars have wrestled with for centuries.

As our listener, you know, what comes to mind for you as we start to think about these aspects of the text? I think those are great questions. You know, I've always been curious about them myself, especially the authorship question. Like, was it really Moses who wrote Genesis as tradition says? Well, that's where things get, you know, a little murky because the book itself, it doesn't actually name an author.

But the traditional view, as you said, is that it was Moses that he wrote the whole Pentateuch, including Genesis. And Dr. Mathews does point out that there is some evidence within the Pentateuch to support, at least in part, Mosaic authorship. Okay.

So what kind of evidence are we talking about here? Well, one thing to consider is that Moses is a central figure in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. He's a leader, a prophet, a lawgiver, a mediator. It would make sense that he would be involved in recording, you know, the history and laws of the Israelites.

Yeah, that's a good point. He's a key figure in this story. So if he was writing down the events of Exodus, you know, the giving of the law at Sinai, then it's not a huge leap to think he might've compiled or written down these earlier accounts, the ones we find in Genesis.

That's right. And there are several passages in those later books where it specifically says that Moses wrote things down, like accounts of battles, you know, a song, even the covenant scroll. Okay.

We know he was a writer, you know. Right. We know he was capable of it.

Yes. Yeah. Okay.

But how could he have written Genesis if he wasn't alive during those events? I mean, we're talking about creation, the flood, the patriarchs. Right. Exactly.

I mean, these are things that happened long before Moses was even born. That's the big question, isn't it? And Dr. Mathews acknowledges that Genesis must have been based on other sources. He suggests that Moses may have compiled, you know, or edited pre-existing documents or maybe even oral traditions that have been passed down through the generations.

That makes sense. Ancient cultures, I mean, they had their own ways of preserving their history and their beliefs, right? Through storytelling. Yes.

And record-keeping. And record-keeping. Like this giant game of telephone, you know, with stories and information passed down over time.

Exactly. And in Genesis itself, there's actually a clue that hints at the existence of these early written sources. Okay.

What is it? Genesis 5.1 mentions a book of the generations of Adam. A book. Yeah.

Okay. So that's pretty strong evidence, I mean, that there were written records, you know, circulating even in those ancient times. Exactly.

I mean, it makes me wonder what else might be out there. Doesn't it? You know, waiting to be discovered. I know.

That's exciting. Dr. Mathews also reminds us that scribes were common in the ancient world. Right.

They were the keepers of knowledge, right? Yeah. They recorded myths, royal records, legal documents, you name it. So it's not hard to imagine that these stories about creation, the flood, and the patriarchs, that they would have been written down too, you know? Right.

Right. Yeah. I can picture it.

Yeah. Those ancient scribes painstakingly copying scrolls by lamplight, you know, making sure the stories are preserved for future generations. Yeah.

It really makes the world of Genesis come alive, doesn't it? It does. It's not just a collection of stories. It's a testament to the human desire to preserve the past, to make sense of our origins, to pass on our beliefs to those who come after us.

Beautifully said. And while we may never know for certain all the sources Moses used, it's safe to say that Genesis was probably compiled from various materials, maybe including oral traditions, written documents, and perhaps even divine revelation. Divine revelation.

You're suggesting God might have directly revealed some of these things to Moses? It's definitely possible, especially when you consider that God communicated directly with Moses at other times, right? Like when he gave him the Ten Commandments. Right, of course. So it's not out of the question that God revealed these stories to Moses, you know, the creation, the fall, the flood, the patriarchs, providing him with this divine perspective on those crucial events.

Yeah, that's an intriguing thought. So basically, when it comes to authorship, it's probably a combination of things. Right.

It's complicated. You know, Moses, earlier writers, oral traditions, and even maybe direct revelation from God. It's like this tapestry woven together from all these different threads, each thread contributing to the richness of the text.

I love that. A tapestry. Yeah, that's a great image.

And it reminds us that the Bible, it's not just a collection of isolated books. Right. You know, it's a unified story, a story that unfolds over centuries and across different cultures.

Okay, so we've talked about authorship. What about historical setting? I mean, when and where did these events actually take place? We're talking about incredibly ancient history here. We are, absolutely.

And dating the earliest chapters, like the creation account, the flood, it's basically impossible. Okay. We're dealing with events that happen long before, you know, our traditional methods of dating.

Right, right. But when we get to the stories of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, we have a little bit more to work with. Okay, so what's the general consensus about when they lived? So based on clues within the Bible itself, as well as evidence from archaeology and other ancient Near Eastern texts, scholars generally place the patriarchal period somewhere between 2200 BC and 1550 BC.

Okay. It's still a long time ago, but at least it gives us a more concrete time frame. Right.

Yeah, that helps. I mean, it makes you wonder what the world was like back then, were there, you know, big empires ruling over vast territories like we see later on in history. Not quite.

Dr. Mathews explains that during the time of the patriarchs, Canaan, the land where they lived, it was mostly a collection of small city-states, each one ruled by its own local king. Okay. So it was a more decentralized political system.

Right, so not like the Roman Empire. No, no, not at all. With a single authority.

It's more like a patchwork of smaller kingdoms. Okay. Each with its own customs and alliances.

And that actually fits with what we see in Genesis, where the patriarchs interact with different kings. You know, they travel freely between regions. Yeah.

Okay. That makes sense. It's a world of, you know, tribal allegiances, shifting power dynamics, constant negotiation.

It makes those stories feel more grounded, you know, more realistic. Yeah, absolutely. We're not talking about massive armies clashing on a battlefield.

It's more about family dynamics, you know? Right. Personal encounters, the challenges of navigating a complex world. Right, those everyday struggles.

It's interesting to think that those seemingly small, personal stories, they actually shape the course of history. That's so true. And Dr. Mathews points out some interesting cultural practices from that time that we see reflected in Genesis.

Oh, okay. Like what? Well, for example, he mentions the custom of adopting a servant as an heir if a man didn't have sons. Okay.

And we actually see Abraham considering doing this with his servant Eliezer before God promises him Isaac. Wow, that's fascinating. It shows how the biblical account aligns with what we know about, you know, ancient Near Eastern culture.

Yeah, absolutely. It's not just a theological text. It's a reflection of real life.

Yes, exactly. And those little details, you know, they bring the story to life. Yeah, yeah, they do.

They make it feel more tangible. We're not just reading about these distant figures. We're getting a glimpse into their lives, their world.

They're real people, you know, with real problems. Who made choices that really did affect the course of history? Yeah, yeah. And speaking of history, I remember Dr. Mathews using a specific term to describe the time period of the patriarchs, something to do with archaeological dating.

Was it the Bronze Age? Yes. Got it. Okay.

He says that the patriarchal period falls within what's called the Early Bronze Age and the Middle Bronze Age. And it's characterized by the widespread use of bronze, you know, for tools and weapons. It was a major technological advancement, one that had a big impact on human society.

Yeah. So we're talking about a time when bronze was like cutting edge technology. I mean, it's like our silicon chips and smartphones today, right? Exactly.

And when you understand that, you know, the material culture of that time, it helps us to appreciate the challenges and the opportunities that they faced. They were living in a world that was changing rapidly. It's incredible to think about, you know, like we're looking back through time and getting a glimpse into their world.

And we've only just scratched the surface of Genesis. There's so much more to explore, so much more to unpack. So much.

And that's what makes studying the Bible so exciting, right? It's a journey, it's a conversation. Yeah, it's never ending. Never ending.

Yeah. So where do we go from here? You know, what's the next step in our exploration? Well, I think it's time to connect the dots, you know, between what we've learned about Genesis and what it means for us, for us today. You know, how do these ancient stories speak to our modern lives? How do they challenge our assumptions, shape our worldview, guide our steps? That's what we'll explore in the final part of our deep dive.

That last part really got me thinking, you know, about those scribes carefully preserving those stories. Right. For us, it's amazing.

But, you know, as cool as the historical stuff is, I keep thinking about those blessings. Yeah. The three, you know, programmatic blessings.

Yes. And how they're woven through the whole story of Genesis. It's like a road map.

Yeah. And guiding us through all the ups and downs and pointing to something bigger. I agree completely.

And I think that's really one of Dr. Mathews's main points, that Genesis isn't just about the past. You know, it speaks to us today, gives us insights into our lives, our relationship with God, and our place in the world. Yeah.

That analogy he used, you know, back to the future. Yes. It really stuck with me.

It's like, we should read Genesis knowing what comes later. Right. With that revelation at Mount Sinai in mind, you know, and the whole unfolding story of God's covenant with his people.

Yeah. It adds a whole new layer of meaning to those early chapters. Absolutely.

And it makes me wonder as our listener, how does that perspective change your understanding of Genesis? Does it make those stories feel more connected to your own life, you know, more relevant to the challenges and questions we face today? You know, it really does. It's like seeing those familiar stories with new eyes, realizing they're not just ancient myths or, you know, historical accounts. They're part of a much bigger story, a narrative of creation, fall, redemption, hope.

And it's still unfolding even now. That's beautifully said. And it brings us back to that idea of Torah as instruction, you know, as a way of life, even though Genesis is mostly narrative.

It's full of examples of what it means to live in a relationship with God, you know, to make choices that line up with his will and to experience both the blessings and the consequences that come with those choices. It's like those stories, even the ones that are kind of messy, are meant to teach us something. Yeah.

You know, navigating life in a way that honors God. They show us what happens when we disobey God, the power of faith, the importance of family, how destructive sin is, and ultimately that enduring hope of redemption. And it's not just about learning from the mistakes of others, you know, it's about recognizing those same patterns in our own lives, those moments when we're tempted to go our own way, to make choices that lead us away from God and his best for us.

It's a sobering thought, but there's also a lot of hope there, because even when those characters mess up, even when they make really bad choices, we still see God's faithfulness, his constant pursuit of relationship, his willingness to redeem and restore. It's like a reminder that no matter how far we stray, God's grace is always there, always reaching out to bring us back. That's the essence of the gospel message, isn't it? It's the story that starts in Genesis and runs through the whole Bible, culminating in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

It's amazing how these ancient stories have such a powerful connection to our lives today. I mean, we may not be facing giants or building towers to reach heaven, but we still wrestle with those same basic questions. You know, like, who am I? What's my purpose? What's the meaning of all this? What about my relationships? We still make choices that have consequences for ourselves and the people around us, and

we still long for that connection with God, that sense of belonging, a hope that goes beyond all the uncertainty in this world.

And that's where Genesis really offers us incredible insight. It reminds us that we're not alone in this journey. We're part of a much bigger story, a story that began with God's creation and continues to unfold according to his plan.

And even amidst all the brokenness and chaos in the world, even in our own struggles and failures, we can find hope knowing that God is still at work. You know, weaving the threads of our lives into his grand tapestry of redemption. So as we wrap up this deep dive into Genesis, what's the one thing you hope our listener will take away from all of this? What's the most important thing to remember? I think if I could boil it down to one sentence, it would be this.

Genesis is not just a book about the past. It's a book about the present and the future. It's an invitation to discover our place in God's unfolding story, a story of love, grace, redemption, and hope.

And that story is still shaping our world and our lives today. That's a powerful reminder. It makes me want to go back and read those stories again, you know, with a fresh perspective, a deeper understanding of what they mean.

Me too. And I would encourage our listener to do the same. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Wrestle with the text. Let those ancient stories challenge your assumptions and broaden your understanding of God, of yourself, and of the world around you. This has been an incredible journey, and I really appreciate you guiding us through all this material.

It's been my pleasure. And thank you, dear listener, for joining us on this deep dive into Genesis. Until next time, keep exploring, keep asking questions, and keep discovering the amazing depths of God's Word.